

A MODERN PETRUCHIO.

BY OLIVIA LOVELL WILSON, AUTHOR OF 'A LEGAL FETTER,' 'LUCK OF ASHMEAD,' 'A KNIGHT OF THE GARTER,' ETC.

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PART IV.—REPARATION. CHAPTER VIII.



FEW moments ended the excitement.

Mr. Olcott had beaten out the flames at the cost of severe burns on his hands, and the frightened group of girls were stifling hysterical sobs and laughter. But, though

Olcott had quenched the fire with ready presence of mind, it was Laurence Owen's arms that closed about the half-fainting form of Ruth Myrick and bore her, under Kate's guidance, to the dressing-room.

There he laid her on the sofa, hastily examining the round white arm with the half-burnt sleeve, breathing a thankful exclamation that only a black smutch stained its fairness. Belle Martin and Nellie Leland came into the room just as Laurence looked up at Kate with this fervent exclamation. He was still kneeling, one arm under Rue's head. She opened her eyes, and, seeing his face so close to hers, colored deeply, and murmured:

"I cannot—thank you!"

Then he gently withdrew his arm, not betraying any embarrassment, however, as he rose to his feet.

"Your thanks are due to Mr. Olcott," he said, kindly but a trifle coldly. "I confess I had no power to move when I saw you were on fire. He was very prompt and courageous."

"I must go home at once," she said, raising herself, only to fall back weakly. Something in the action and the glance she gave Laurence evidently moved him to speak, but he checked himself as Mr. Olcott hurried into the room.

"Ruth, you are not hurt!" he cried, forgetful of every presence save hers.

"No, no. I am only nervous. I was so frightened. How can I thank you?" said Rue, then added in a low voice of entreaty: "Will you—"

"Miss Myrick, my aunt's carriage is at the door, ready to take you home," Laurence's (554)

voice interposed, in smooth tones. He had been absent only a moment, but he had Ruth's cloak on his arm, and Kate was already wrapping the pretty head in the soft white nubia; and, before Mr. Olcott realized the intention, or Rue could remonstrate, Laurence was gaining his way.

Ruth said not a word. To Mr. Olcott's anxious whisper as to a call on the morrow, she murmured dissent, and then clung to Laurence's arm until she safely reached the carriage. Arriving at her own door, she found Laurence once more waiting to conduct her into the house, nor did he leave her until she was safe in the care of her faithful maid.

* * * * *

Eric and Laurence were to stay in Brompton that night, and, as they walked together under the stars toward the hotel, Eric said suddenly:

"Larry, did you receive a letter from Ruth Myrick just before our departure last year?"

There was a moment's silence, then Laurence, who was struggling to light a cigarette in the face of an opposing breeze, replied:

"No letter written by Ruth Myrick ever reached me. Confound the matches!"

"Well, right or not, I am going to tell you. She wrote a letter, asking your pardon for her conduct. She thought it would reach you before you left South Walsingham. But she never got a reply, and so was doomed to the silence women seem born to suffer—heaven help them!"

"Eric, if you have another match, be kind enough to give it to me," was the irrelevant reply. "Ah, thanks! now I can listen comfortably. Don't be vexed, Eric. Let me see: you said she repented a little, did you not? I have a fancy penitence is becoming. She is fairer than ever."

Eric was annoyed, but he only said indifferently, quoting a favorite poem:

"What care I how fair she be,
If she be not fair for me."

"But I do care a little," said Laurence, tossing his cigarette aside, after all his care in lighting it. "Just so much that I am determined to marry that woman, and no other."

"I am free to confess I do not understand you," said Eric, in a wondering tone.

"Only this: I believe Ruth Myrick will marry me now, and I mean to make her my wife."

"Bravo!" Eric spoke, with sarcasm. "I am sure you will win. You have money and position now. A girl of Ruth's temperament has more than the usual woman's prerogative of changing her mind under the circumstances."

"She wrote me a letter, repenting her conduct when she knew me as Arthur Owen's heir. The repentance has a strange flavor of worldliness. I am glad you mentioned it, Eric. You think she will marry me for my money, now?"

"Perhaps! I may be unjust. She is a friend of Kate's, remember."

"Then she shall marry me for that, if she pleases. Her father is in a very sad condition, financially, I hear. I hold a heavy mortgage on his property in Brompton. How has he acted toward you?"

"He has been putting me off for days, and I knew it was to gain time," Eric replied. "I never trusted him as my father did. But, Larry, do you intend to buy your wife?"

"Yes, if need be," with cool impudence that did not conceal a defiance in the tone.

"Go slowly, Larry! I cannot see you rashly commit a worse folly than that of a year ago. I see you love the girl yet, and—"

"Love will not enter into this bargain, my friend. I am going to buy my wife, and abide the issue. If money prove a greater power than love, we will profit thereby. Keep silence, Eric, whatever my course may be—only remembering that, should I fail again with Ruth Myrick, I shall not do so until I have proved that revenge is sweet. Good-night."

"One moment, Laurence—"

"No more to-night, Morris—I am in no humor for it. Forgive me, and, as you love me, let me go."

CHAPTER IX.

THE morning after the fair, Ruth Myrick awoke with a dull sense of pain weighing upon her. It was a novel sensation for our gay little heroine. She pressed her hands to her forehead, and tried to sleep again and cheat herself into believing that her father's revelation and Laurence Owen's presence at the fair were part of some confused dream.

Until Laurence's cool light words rang in her ears, she had not realized how much hope had lain dormant in her heart since the day when she discovered his power to wake her conscience and prove her a tender-hearted woman.

She had looked eagerly forward to this meeting; she had longed for the old admiring love she remembered in his frank glance. Now, alas! Rue sighed wearily, and rang the bell to summon her maid.

Fanny entered, bearing a lovely basket of English violets and a dainty note. There was no card with the flowers, but the lines read:

"DEAR MISS MYRICK:

I trust you are fully recovered from last evening's nervous fright. If so, it will give me great pleasure to call on you to-day, between four and five. Sincerely your friend,

LAURENCE OWEN."

It was wonderful, the new life that came to Rue with these written words. All the morning, she sat near the violets and sang softly at her work. She did not ponder over her father's trouble. Was not Laurence coming at four o'clock? All her thoughts went forward to meet that hour, as if with his presence every anxiety must cease. She was completely absorbed in the thought of this happiness soon to be hers. No shadow dimmed the sunshine of her anticipation; so it may be understood that Ruth Myrick had surrendered absolutely, and, as is usual with the heart that holds out the longest against love, the tide had turned with overwhelming force, bearing her toward happiness or unutterable woe. Ah, had she seen the stern curve of Laurence Owen's lip when he said, the night before, "Revenge is sweet!"

She was looking her best that afternoon, as she awaited his call. She was clad in soft pink cashmere, the neck cut square and filled with lace, while against her bosom nestled the purple-blue violets. The color came and went in her cheeks, and she looked sweeter, gentler, and in every way more lovely than the arrogant young woman who had given Laurence Owen that cruel answer a year previous.

From four to six, in Brompton, was a fashionable time for calling. The young society-people made many of their engagements for the evening at this hour. Rue was nervously anxious no one should call during Laurence Owen's visit. But she had received no word of inquiry from Mr. Olcott, and she feared that he might come in spite of her prohibition. How vexatious it would be to have them meet in her presence! She was spared this annoyance, however; and, at half-past four, Mr. Owen was announced.

Something in the childish frankness of her greeting seemed to speak of the change in her feelings toward him. But he felt no responsive thrill of pleasure; he was as self-possessed and

genial as on the preceding evening, leading the conversation into easy channels and fascinating Rue all the more in that his manner seemed devoid of any effort to win her regard. He appeared to feel that his call conferred a favor, and Rue, under the glamor of this new phase of his character, was not quite sure herself that it did not.

During his visit, Fanny entered with a huge bouquet of hot-house flowers, roses and azaleas. They had a card attached, and Fanny brought a note with them. Rue glanced indifferently at both card and blossoms.

"Read the note," Laurence said, in the easy tone of authority which a woman sometimes finds pleasant to obey. While she read, he admired the roses.

"Will you pardon me if I answer it?" she asked, looking up from the page.

"Certainly," he replied; "but I hope poor Olcott is not to be doomed to disappointment?"

"How do you know that the note is from him?" she said.

He laughed softly, and lifted the card attached to the bouquet.

She gave a little pout of vexation as she seated herself to write. She gave the note to Fanny, saying:

"Send this at once. And stop—one moment. Take these flowers away."

"You will surely give them a place of honor," Laurence said, in a lazy teasing tone.

"Leave them where they are, Fanny." Rue spoke quietly. "Pardon me, Mr. Owen; I did not notice how much you were enjoying them."

Then, as Fanny departed, Ruth added petulantly:

"I am glad you like them. I hate hot-house flowers."

"Can you get any other at this season?" asked Laurence. "These roses are exquisite."

"I prefer violets," she said, laying one small hand on the blossoms nestling against her bosom. "They remind one of spring, woods, and green fields, and all sorts of pleasant things."

"A favored person must have been the donor, for them to find a place so near your heart, Miss Myrick," he said, with a quizzical smile.

"I have not thanked you for them yet. They came this morning, when I was feeling very forlorn, and cheered me like the voice of a spring full of promise."

He raised his eyebrows in well-feigned surprise.

"You are kind, to credit me with such thoughtfulness," he said. "Was there no card attached?"

"I beg your pardon," answered Rue, blushing deeply. "There was no card, and they were brought to me with your note."

"It was a natural mistake. But, since you no longer know who sent the violets, will you not accept Olcott's roses?"

"No; I like these violets best," she replied.

"Will you tell me why you refused Olcott's invitation for the theatre this evening?"

"I cannot imagine what gratification it would be to you to hear the reason, or how you came to know the contents of his note."

"He told me he intended taking you to hear *Modjeska*; we were discussing a theatre-party last evening. Madeline wished to go. Olcott is an old chum of mine, you know. He is a good fellow."

"A very good fellow, indeed," she said, imitating Owen's tone; "so good that I find him at times a bore. I refused to go to-night because—because I—"

"Your usual caprice," he interposed, coolly. "I hoped you had outgrown such folly."

"You are hardly polite," she flashed, angrily.

"No? I only recognized the old spirit anew, as in the preference for violets over roses. You used to adore roses. I hoped your nature had changed with your preference, but I am mistaken."

"You try to hurt me," she said, her eyes filling with tears; "you are not generous or kind."

"Two attributes you value highly, and probably practice toward Olcott," quoth Laurence, with cool nonchalance.

"Mr. Owen!"

There was no anger in her tone now, only an appeal that was almost a sob.

He stepped quickly toward her.

"I beg your pardon," he said, softly, taking her hand in his. "I was rude, and, what is more, untruthful. I sent the violets," and, bending quickly, he pressed his lips against her soft neck.

She started back, confused and blushing.

"Forgive me!" he exclaimed; "I could not help it!"

"I am not angry," she murmured, in a faltering voice, and then he walked to the window and stood gazing out.

At this moment, the opportune entrance of Fanny relieved their mutual embarrassment.

Miss Myrick glanced at the two cards on the tray which the maid handed her, and said:

"Show them in." Then, as Fanny went out, she added to Laurence: "Kate and Eric—I am so glad you are here!"

The visitors entered, and cordial greetings were interchanged. The four had much to discuss concerning the approaching marriage of Kate and Mr. Morris, and grew quite merry over their five-o'clock tea.

Laurence lingered until the others had taken their leave.

"I have made an unpardonably long call, Miss Myrick," he said, lightly; "but I wanted to ask you if you will accept an invitation from my aunt to dine at 'The Lindens' to-morrow? If you will promise us the great pleasure, I will call for you at four, and we will drive over. There will be no other guests."

Rue hesitated a second; then, meeting his glance, her own fell, as she replied:

"I shall be very happy to accept your invitation."

"Thank you," he said, simply, and bowed himself out of the room.

The following day, Ruth was restlessly happy in looking forward to her second meeting with Laurence Owen. She knew Eric Morris had been with her father all the morning, and once she fancied she heard Laurence Owen's voice in the hall leading to the office and library.

Her father kissed her tenderly at luncheon, and she thought he looked less haggard than usual; but there was a sort of pity in his caress which she could not understand. Was the blow soon to fall? No, she could not believe the world would frown on her now, when even in his absence she was listening ever for the voice that filled her with hope and assurance of safety. She could not speak to her father of the hope within her. To him, this wonderful revelation of love in her nature would mean but a safe refuge from a life of privation. Besides, it would have seemed a sacrilege to breathe a word of her happiness in any human ear.

One may well wonder that she realized so little what a rare revenge it would be for Laurence Owen to deceive her, as she had deceived him so short a time before. But her awakening heart only recognized the noble nature she had cruelly wronged in her ignorance and folly; and, with the beautiful humility of true affection, she cried in her heart: "I am not worthy!"

It was an humbleness no one imagined could find place in Ruth Myrick's character. Even the man who was about to risk his life's happiness on so doubtful a venture felt no surety of ultimate success, still less of finding peace in its attainment.

Imperturbable, unmoved, he put aside all softer feelings and gave himself up to the

spirit of conquest, which determined to conquer if he could not win.

When Laurence Owen came to take Rue to dine with his aunts, he was in a mood such as she could little appreciate in him. He looked grave, and was rather quiet. His face was set in stern dignified lines, and Rue thought the change from airy nonchalance rather becoming. He explained to her briefly that he had been undergoing business vexations all the morning. The mills at West Avon were giving him trouble, and he found many matters connected with the estate in a bad condition.

Miss Myrick's reception at The Lindens was delightful in its frank hospitality. Miss Jean and her sister were charming hostesses, and Madeline was very fond of Ruth.

Laurence preserved the same quiet demeanor, having a little conference with his aunt, Miss Jean, immediately after dinner. Although the consultation was in an aside, Rue was so acute to all that affected Laurence that she knew both parties were vexed and spoke sharply.

Toward the close of the evening, Madeline coaxed their guest to play. Ruth was an excellent musician; her talent had been thoroughly cultivated; but to-night she played as she never had before—it seemed fairly the music of inspiration. She closed with one of Mendelssohn's exquisite themes. Laurence quietly left the room as the last note died away; Miss Annie came and gently kissed Ruth. When she rose from the instrument, however, Miss Jean, who had watched her nephew through this scene until his exit, said in a low tone:

"How is it you seem to have ten souls in your fingers and so little soul elsewhere?"

The voice was stern, while tears were brimming the eyes so like Laurence's. Ruth felt sure then that Miss Jean knew all the past. She also felt the spirit of rebellion rising within her. A flippant answer was on her lips; but Miss Jean laid a kind hand over hers, saying: "Perhaps, though, we have misunderstood you."

Rue could only say "Thank you" and feel disturbed and vexed. It was the sole incident which marred her evening's pleasure, and the drive home was one of rare delight. Laurence was so gently grateful to her for the pleasure she had given, and quietly yet delightfully confidential in telling her of his past life. Yet, after all, when she reached home and thought over what he had told her, he might have told an utter stranger as much! It was his manner of telling it, she concluded, and was satisfied.

Mr. Owen's attentions to Miss Myrick soon

became a subject of comment in Brompton. Mr. Oloott retired from the field, baffled by this hot and hasty wooer, who seemed to carry everything before him. Once or twice in the fortnight that followed, Rue strove to brave the displeasure of her persistent suitor. She roused to her old resentment at his interference on more than one occasion. She might have been a dove beating against a stone wall, for all it availed her. Once, when she grew very angry, he frightened her by an equal burst of passion, that left no room for her displeasure, and filled her with dismay. Yet no lover could have been more charmingly penitent, or so won her by his penitence.

Yet he never said: "I love you, Rue!" those words so sweet to hear. But love is patient when it is deep and strong.

Once she asked her father how his affairs stood.

"Eric Morris is the son of my old friend," answered Mr. Myrick. "He knows I have been unfortunate, and he is very considerate. Laurence Owen is in every sense a noble fellow, and in time our affairs may be adjusted. After that, my daughter—" he kissed her to complete the sentence, and she dared ask no more.

One evening, she had been at a large reception with Mr. Owen, and, on their return, Laurence accepted her invitation to enter, as he had done a year before. The former scene was vividly brought to the minds of both, as Ruth led the way to the same little room, where the gas burned low. Laurence spoke first.

"This scene reminds me," he said, "of a former folly of mine."

"Long repented?" she asked, lightly, reaching to turn the gas up a little.

"But never forgotten. A man does not soon forget an experience that teaches him bitterness of spirit. If he does, he is a fool." He spoke sternly.

"Is no reparation possible?" she asked.

Her white cloak had slipped from her shoulders, and she stood looking at him wistfully. She made a rare picture, the tasteful dress she wore contrasting with the fair white neck and arms. He saw her hands tremble as she tossed her flowers and gloves on the table. But he regarded her gloomily.

"Yes, there is one way in which you can expiate the past, if you so will," he said. "I intended asking permission to call to-morrow morning, but, since to-night offers the opportunity, I will speak at once."

In the pause he made, she moved so as to rest her hand on the table. Her face grew a little pale at his tone.

"I think you know, Miss Myrick," he continued, "that your father is very heavily involved, financially. In fact, it is hardly possible for him to extricate himself honorably, without depriving himself and you of all that goes to make life desirable."

"I can work," she said, flashing a defiant glance at him.

"Pardon me if I remind you," he returned, with a sarcastic smile, "that what you could earn would hardly keep you in gloves! There is scarcely a position which you are competent to fill, accomplished as I grant you to be. Your father is an old man—too old, in fact, to raise himself from the ruin threatening him. I hold one mortgage which would alone swallow up the greatest portion of his property. More than a year ago, I was boyishly foolish, and made you an offer of my heart and hand, the former full of love, the latter ready to toil and strive to make a fortune for you. I was young, foolish, hopeful, and passionate. You wisely refused the very sentimental offer. I now make no profession of sentiment. I have learned to know the world and your heart better. I offer you luxury, a pleasant home, all the freedom you crave, and, the day you are my wife, I cancel the mortgage I hold upon your father's property." His voice rose and fell evenly. The pleading expression in her eyes had no power to change the sternness of his face.

"And I—I—refuse—your offer," she gasped.

"Consider well before you reply," he said. "You asked just now if you could make no reparation for the past. Is it nothing to save your father from ruin?"

"My father? Ruined?"

"I must use the ugly word, to be truthful. You have hitherto led a life of whim and will. Curb them now, if you have any daughterly affection, and buy from me, as I buy from you, what no heartfelt devotion and love could effect. I promise you freedom after marriage. I will not interfere with your pleasure. I will endeavor to make you happy in your own way. I do not plead with you. I shall not grieve if you reject my offer. It is only a matter of moment as it affects you and yours. Do you accept my proposal?"

She turned from him, and, shaken by sobs, buried her face in her hands. He started forward; then, checking himself, stood grasping the back of a chair with sudden force. His face grew white with pain, as her sobs fell on his ear.

"I thought—you—loved—me!" The words broke forth like those of a child full of grievances.

"That is too trivial a question to enter into

our compact. In this year, I have grown older, wiser, and richer, and my wisdom teaches me that you care little for any man's honest affection. I have yet to prove it. Will you marry me?"

"Does my father wish it? Does he know—"

"Of the sacrifice? Yes. I told him weeks ago that you had it in your power to save him."

Laurence's voice had fallen from sternness to a monotone, as if rehearsing a part. She forced back her tears and turned to him bravely.

"All you have said I deserve—more, perhaps, than you can realize. If you will accept a wife on such terms, I consent to your proposal. Since it is a matter of barter and exchange, I may demand all the conditions. When do you expect me to fulfill this engagement?"

"On the twentieth day of May," he replied, coolly.

She started in surprise.

"It is impossible!"

"It is possible, and our marriage must take place on that date."

"It leaves hardly three weeks' time!"

"You forget it does not take two days to make a bargain."

"I must ask you one question." She spoke pleadingly, and moved toward him. "When you left me, last year, I wrote you a letter. You did not reply to it—you doomed me to bitter silence. Did you mean this as punishment?"

"Your letter failed to reach me," he replied, slowly.

The knowledge acted like fire on her quivering nerves. She was safe. He had never read those burning words. He did not know she loved him. She gathered all her forces together.

"You have judged me fairly," she said, proudly. "Fate has then decreed that you should buy what you could never win. Answer me one more question: Is there none of the pure love left that you offered me a year ago?"

"Not an atom of the old love remains," he replied, courtly.

"It is well. I did not wish to wound you in the future. You used to be very sensitive."

"I have grown older and wiser. Until to-morrow, then, good-bye." He would have taken her hand, but she drew it away—when, before she could divine his purpose, he kissed her on the lips and forehead.

"Good-night," he said, gently, meeting her startled glance. "You forget that you are my promised wife—I demand so much as my right."

He left her standing in surprise and con-

fusion, the warm blood rushing to meet his kiss upon her forehead, her heart beating wildly with wounded pride.

CHAPTER X.

A NINE days' wonder fell upon Brompton when the announcement was made that Laurence Owen was not only engaged to Miss Ruth Myrick, but would wed her in three weeks. Eric Morris went at once to his friend, but could make little of Laurence's replies.

"Marrying in haste, to repent at leisure, Larry, I fear," Eric concluded.

"I shall expect Mrs. Owen to fulfill the latter portion of the adage," came the answer, with cool sarcasm. "I shall not repent my bargain."

He asked Eric to sustain him, however, by being "best man," to which his friend consented reluctantly.

Kate, who had been busily engrossed in the mysteries of her own trousseau, abandoned her affairs to make a trip to New York with Ruth. But Kate was as little pleased with the state of things as was Eric Morris.

"It does not seem right. Rue is not really happy, and I never saw Laurence so morose as since his engagement," she said to her lover.

"I fancy Laurence is endeavoring to make Rue's proud spirit bend to his," Eric rejoined.

"He may as well try to chain the west-wind," Kate said, positively.

"Wait and see," was Eric's oracular reply.

Mr. Myrick alone appeared satisfied. He had only one short interview with his daughter on the subject, during which he said:

"My child, do not think I would sacrifice you. Once, in my harassing anxiety, I begged you to consider Mr. Oleott's offer. But I want you to marry no man against your will. Laurence has told me of the canceled mortgage. It is generous conduct on his part. He is really a noble whole-souled fellow. But no woman should take this step blindly. Do you love Laurence Owen?"

"He has not asked me to love him."

"But you are happy and satisfied in marrying him? Answer me truthfully."

"I am satisfied," she said, "and I marry him willingly."

"And there is no one to whom I would more willingly resign you. Laurence has developed a wonderful business capacity. He is managing the estate very cleverly. You will be a wealthy woman all your life, Rue."

"What more could I desire?" she asked. "Believe me, papa, it is as it should be. I have a small heart, but great desires!"

And with this he had to be content. But he smiled when alone, as if he had a secret knowledge of the human heart, and knew its weakness.

Laurence was a devoted lover, if lavishing delicate courtesies and costly gifts is any test. Rue alone knew how coldly distant was the manner of bestowing these presents and attentions; how distraught he was when with her. She endeavored to pursue the same cold even course, so natural to her before this tide of love overwhelmed her soul. Often, after one of these evenings spent under such restraint, she paced her room in a whirlwind of passionate impatience. Once or twice she was tempted to entreat him to try and awaken the old sweet love in his heart—to pour her wealth of love at his feet, and leave the issue in his hands. The thought of a life spent by his side without his affection was agony to her. Yet to deprive herself now of the torment and pleasure of his presence was equally impossible. Altogether these last days before her marriage were full of such strange fluctuations of joy and doubt, as could not fail to make a lasting impression on Rue's fast-developing character.

Laurence was absent several days in each week. The mills at West Avon had engrossed much of his time before his engagement. Rue got to hate the sound of Avon in those days. Her father was continually consulting with Laurence, and she always heard this word, and saw the cloud deepen on her lover's brow afterward. The subject of the wedding-journey met with so much indifference on the part of the pair concerned, that Kate grew very much vexed. It was finally settled that they were to go immediately to New York, and what this curious young couple decided upon, further than this, no one knew. Rue's lack of interest spurred Laurence to the first really impatient speech he had made since their betrothal.

"I leave the decision with you," he said; "your word is, of course, my law. I pray heaven I may fulfill it!" with a sarcastic curl of his handsome lip, but just so much of sincerity as to perplex her.

Kate scolded, cajoled, and irritated herself by trying to make them interested in their own wedding preparations, and ended by taking the entire anxiety upon herself. She and her mother came from Elland to stay with Ruth until what Eric insisted on calling the "fatal day."

Madeline Owen and Kate were to be bridesmaids. Belle Martin constituted herself general adviser.

"It was so sly of you to capture our hero,"

she said, merrily, to Rue. "They say Dick Olcott is inconsolable."

"He'll soon find consolation," said Rue, laughing.

CHAPTER XI.

THE night before the twentieth of May was dark and cloudy. The bridesmaids looked anxiously at the sky and sighed as they left the church, where they had been rehearsing the safe conduct up the aisle. The wedding would take place at noon the next day. It was to be a very English affair, out of deference to Miss Jean Owen's old-country ideas.

"It looks very like rain," said Madeline, as they came out of the church.

Laurence was about to help Rue into the carriage, when a boy ran up to him with a dispatch. Laurence tore it open hastily, and read it by the fast-fading light.

"No bad news, I hope?" said Eric.

"No, but I must catch the express to West Avon. I fear there is sad work down there."

Rue saw that he closed his lips sternly, as if more moved than he cared to manifest.

"You will go home with the ladies?" continued Laurence.

"We may as well take you to the station first, Laurence," Rue said. "What is the trouble at Avon?"

"There is no necessity; I have plenty of time," he answered, ignoring her question. "I will be back on the first train to-morrow morning. Good-evening."

"Don't miss your train, Larry," called Eric, laughingly; "remember, you have an imperative engagement at noon!"

"Do not fear," was Laurence's reply, as he strode away.

Rue watched him go with a sinking heart. It seemed to her he would never return. Then she reproached herself for the nervous fear. But his departure was the knell to her last hopes of setting herself right in his esteem before marriage, for she had resolved to tell Laurence this night that her love belonged to him, and that, without his return, life would be a dreary waste. She had felt she must not meet her wedding-day with other than the truth on her lips, come what might. Now, alas! she had waited too long.

The twentieth dawned with lowering sky, gusts of rain, and freaks of sunshine, that savored more of April than May. Rue was very passive. Her bridesmaids lamented the storm and chattered over the array of presents. Eric came to Kate toward noon, saying nervously:

"I have seen nothing of Larry. He has evidently missed the morning train."

"He can come by the second train, then, and get here at ten-thirty; it will be late, but no matter," said Kate, calmly.

"That train has been dropped," said Eric, shaking his head. "I fear he will not discover it in time. If so, he can hardly get here by hard driving before one o'clock."

"Eric! you do not mean it?"

"Yes, indeed! I only found it out myself a little while ago. You must not tell Rue. How does she look?"

"Don't! You speak as if she were dead and laid out," protested Kate. "She is very quiet. She wanted me to tell you that she particularly wished to see Laurence before going to the church. Have you telegraphed him?"

"Yes—but have had no reply. I am really at my wit's-end, Kate, since he has failed to come. I cannot understand such an absence. He was to meet me at eleven, and we were to be here half an hour before going to the church. Delay at this time is simply outrageous. I have had the wildest thoughts—"

"What were they?" Kate demanded, her own glance answering his guiltily.

"I am ashamed to utter them, yet I see you have caught the reflection," he replied.

"Oh, Eric—the shame, the dishonor, the unmanliness, of such a revenge—"

"Tut, tut, Kitty—it is too ugly a thing even to surmise. Yet, if I thought it possible, dear as he is to me, I would gladly—kill him!"

"Oh, hush, Eric! Telegraph again, and wait. I must go to Ruth."

"Heaven help the girl! Good-bye, sweetheart—thank God we will have no such wedding-day!"

Kate entered Rue's chamber about half-past eleven, clad in her white robes, but alas! bearing no message to explain the non-appearance of Laurence Owen. As yet, however, Rue had felt no alarm. She knew Laurence's first arrangement had been to come to the house at eleven-thirty and then proceed to the church. She only judged he had refused her request for an interview before the ceremony, and intended

giving her no time for those words she longed to utter. It was his last discourtesy as a lover. She encountered Kate's glance, her dark eyes burning feverishly amid the deathly pallor of her face. Even her lips were white, as she asked:

"Laurence is here?"

"He has not come yet, Rue," Kate replied, trying to speak unconcernedly.

Madeline was at the window, and she motioned Kate to give Rue her vinaigrette.

"It is very late," she said, as Kate went up to her. "I wonder Laurence is not here."

For reply, Kate raised her finger to her lips. But Rue caught the movement; she paused in her walk up and down the room and looked at Kate.

"I cannot understand his refusing me these last few moments," she said. "What have you to tell me? Why is he not here?"

"I am sure he has missed his train; it is nothing more," Kate said, soothingly.

"I wish you would leave me," Ruth returned, with sudden pleading in her tone; "I want to be alone."

As she spoke, Mr. Myrick entered, looking much distressed. Rue went to him, and clung about his neck.

"My poor girl," he said, "I fear something serious has happened to Laurence."

"Oh, I know he is dead or dying!" sobbed Madeline, wildly. "He would have been here long ago, had he been able to come. He is dead! he is dead!"

Kate tried in vain to stifle the childish wail; but Rue listened, repeating Madeline's last word in a tone of relief.

"Dead," she said, turning to her father. "Ah, you know it! I see it in your face. Tell me, father—I can bear it! Oh, my love—"

"Ruth, Ruth, my child, I know no more than you. I fear the worst."

Then Kate cried:

"The carriage is here, and Eric—"

"And Laurence?" Mr. Myrick asked.

Kate hesitated, then turned from the window.

"No," she said, in a trembling tone. "No, Eric is—alone!"

[TO BE CONCLUDED.]

A LESSON.

PATIENT the wounded earth receives the plough's sharp share,
And hastes the sweet return of golden grain to bear;
The sea remembers not the vessel's rending keel,

But rushes joyously the ravage to conceal.
So, patient under scorn and injury abide;
Who conquereth all within, may dare the world outside.



A FLIRTATION.

THE END STORY THE END OF IT

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